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AMERICAN HEROES

LYNDON B. JOHNSON



By Julia Benna

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

BOSTON

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Growing Up in Texas

Sometimes people see problems they want to solve. How can they help? There are many ways. Lyndon Baines Johnson decided to help by taking part in the government of the United States.

Johnson became a member of Congress. Congress is the part of the government of the United States that makes laws. Later he became President. He worked for laws he thought could help solve the nation's problems.

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born in this house in Stonewall, Texas.



One problem Johnson wanted to solve was **poverty**. He knew that many people did not have good homes, enough food, or other necessary things. Johnson wanted to improve life for them. He saw these problems as he was growing up. Johnson was born near Stonewall, Texas, in 1908. Most families in the area where he was born had little money. Like them, Johnson lived in a house with no electricity or running water.

Lyndon is about five years old in this picture.



Lyndon's father was a **representative** in the Texas legislature. A legislature is a group of leaders that make laws. Lyndon enjoyed listening to his father talk about politics.

When Lyndon was a boy, his grandfather predicted that Lyndon would be a United States **senator** one day. Lyndon later said, "I loved going with my father to the legislature. The only thing I loved more was going with him on the trail during his **campaigns**."

Lyndon's father (right) was a member of the Texas legislature, which meets in this building.



After going to college, Lyndon Johnson taught school in Cotulla, Texas. The students at the school were growing up in a poor area. Their school had little money for books or teachers. There were no sports or activities.

Johnson knew that growing up in poverty was hard. He bought balls, bats, and gloves for the school. His students knew that he cared about them. He never forgot them.

Johnson started an athletic club for his students at the Welhausen School.



Representing Texas

The United States went through hard times in the 1930s. Millions of Americans lost their jobs. Johnson wanted to help. He thought he could do more by taking part in government.

Johnson got his chance in 1931. He was asked to work for a member of Congress from Texas. Johnson went to Washington, D.C. He learned what people needed and how the government worked. In 1935, he went back to Texas, but he promised to return to Washington, D.C.

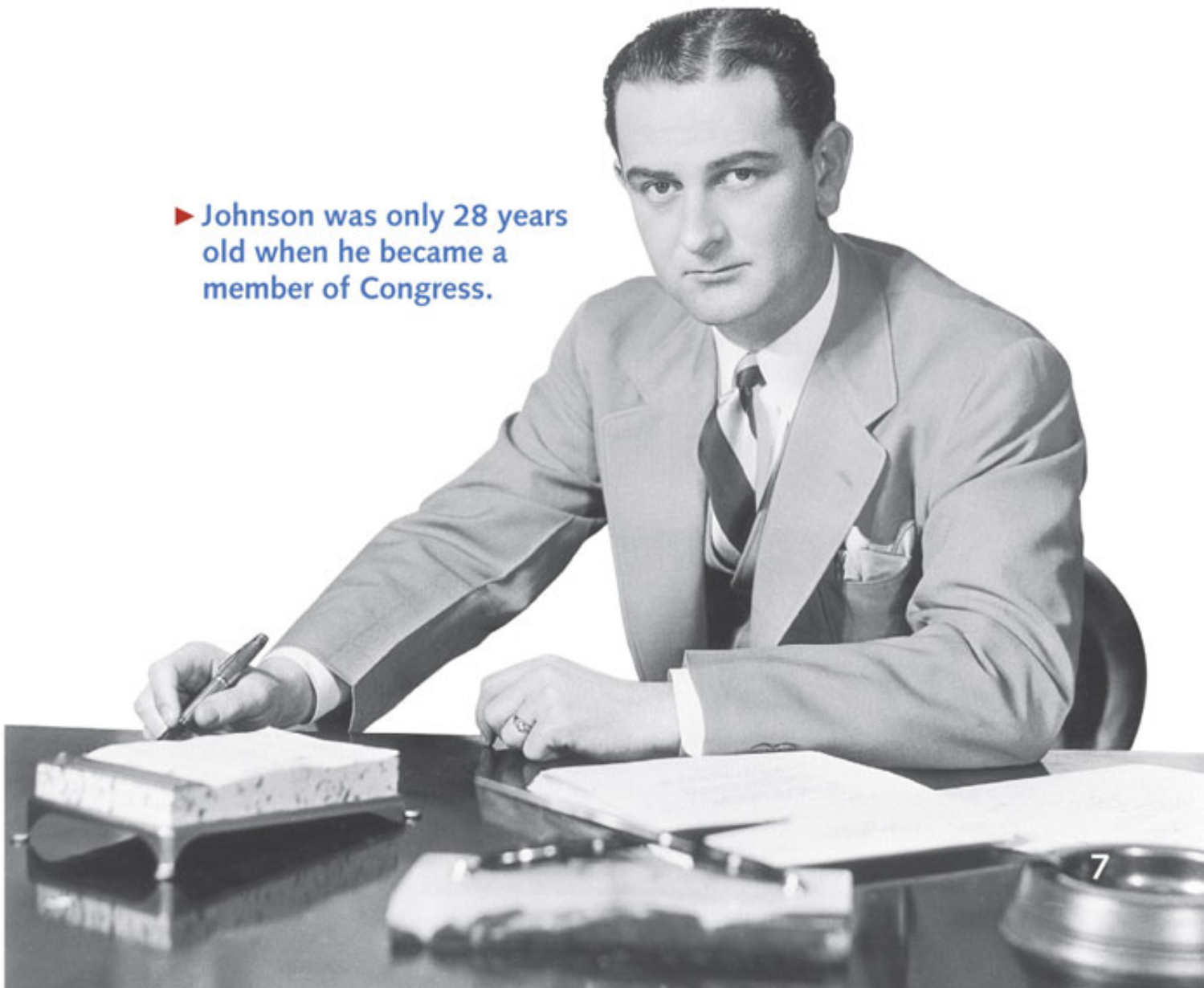
Johnson came to the United States Capitol, where Congress meets, in Washington, D.C. He worked on programs to help people in need of jobs.



In 1937, Johnson ran for the United States House of Representatives. The House of Representatives is one part of the United States Congress. The other part is the Senate.

Voters in his **district** elected Johnson. The district was the part of Texas he would represent in Congress. As Johnson had promised, he returned to Washington, D.C. He was the youngest member of Congress.

► Johnson was only 28 years old when he became a member of Congress.



In Congress, Johnson's job was to vote on ideas for new laws. Johnson's father told him to think about how each of his votes in Congress would help people. Johnson took his father's advice.

Johnson believed that education could help people overcome poverty. He voted for more money for schools. He also voted to build roads to make travel easier. Johnson remembered his own childhood on a farm without electricity. He voted to bring electrical power to places like his hometown.

Johnson represented the 10th Congressional District in his home state of Texas.





- ▲ These boys met Johnson during his race for the Senate. They are wearing shirts that read, "Lyndon Johnson is the Little Fellow's Friend."

After working in the House, Johnson decided to run for the Senate. As a senator, he would have more power to help Texas and the country than he had as a representative. He was elected in 1948. His grandfather's prediction had been right. Johnson became a United States senator.

Johnson worked hard in the Senate. He respected the **authority** of senators from other states. He was very good at getting people to agree with him.

In the Senate, Johnson worked on important problems. In the 1950s, he thought that one of the country's problems was that African Americans were often treated unfairly. Some cities and states had laws that created **segregation**. In these states, African Americans weren't allowed to stay in the same hotels or eat at the same restaurants as other people. When African Americans rode buses, they had to sit in the back. Many people thought these laws should end.

People from all over the country took part in marches and other activities to show that they opposed segregation.



African American leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thurgood Marshall said that all people had **civil rights** that should be respected. Civil rights are the basic freedoms that citizens all share. As a senator, Johnson could fight segregation. He used his skill at persuading people to get civil rights laws passed. He still wanted to do more, however.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thurgood Marshall were civil rights leaders while Johnson was a senator.



Martin Luther King, Jr.



Thurgood Marshall

The White House

In 1960, a senator named John F. Kennedy ran for President. Kennedy asked Johnson if he would run for Vice President with him.

Johnson had a difficult decision to make. He was a leader in the Senate. As Vice President, he would be less powerful. Some friends told him not to accept Kennedy's offer.

Johnson decided that he could do more to help people if he worked with Kennedy. Together, the two men ran for President and Vice President. They won the election.

This is a campaign button from 1960.





▲ Johnson was sworn in as President of the United States on November 22, 1963.

Just two years after Johnson became Vice President, however, President Kennedy was killed. It was a sad time for the country.

When a President dies, the Vice President becomes President. Suddenly, Johnson was President of the United States.

Like all Americans, Johnson was shocked and sad, but he knew it was important to be a good leader. He said, "I will do my best. This is all I can do. I ask for your help." He promised to continue the work that President Kennedy had started.

One of Johnson's first acts as President was to work on civil rights. President Kennedy had wanted Congress to pass a new law protecting the civil rights of African Americans. The law would end segregation. Congress had not passed the law, however. Some members wanted to keep segregation.

By 1964, many people had joined the struggle for civil rights. Johnson knew he had to do something. He decided to convince Congress to pass the law known as the Civil Rights Act.

Johnson worked with Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders to write the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



As President, Johnson used his skills of persuasion. Because he had been in Congress for many years, he knew how to talk to senators and representatives. Johnson spoke to members of Congress and convinced them to vote for the law. The Senate argued about the law for 83 days.

At last, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Johnson's **diligence** helped to end segregation throughout the United States.

On July 2, 1964, people gathered to watch President Johnson sign the Civil Rights Act.



The Great Society

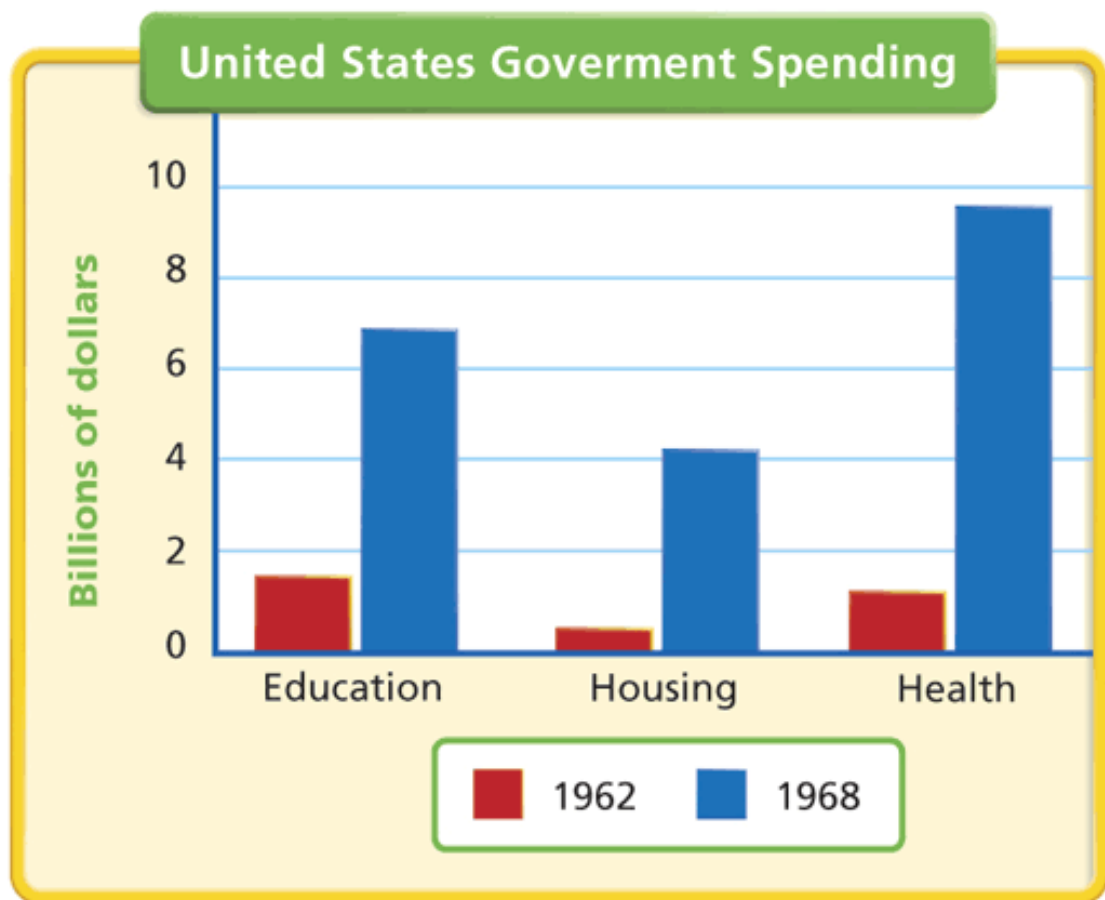
In 1964, it was time for Americans to vote for President again. Johnson promised that if he were elected, he would keep working to create a “Great Society.” To President Johnson this meant “an end to poverty and racial injustice . . . a place where every child can find knowledge.”

Johnson did very well. He won the election by 15 million votes. After such a big victory, he was ready to use his power as President to try to make people’s lives better.

- This copy of *The Saturday Evening Post*, from 1964, tells about Johnson’s plan for a Great Society.



As part of his Great Society plan, Johnson suggested hundreds of new laws to Congress. Some laws were meant to improve education, the environment, and medical care. Others made cars safer, or supported art and public television. The biggest part of Johnson's plan, though, was to help people who did not have much opportunity.



▲ The Great Society plan led to more spending on education, housing, and health. Johnson became President in 1963 and left office in 1969.

Johnson wanted to give more opportunity to African Americans because unfair treatment had not stopped with the end of segregation. In some states African Americans had to pass tests before they could vote. The tests were meant to stop them from voting. In other places, African Americans had to pay money to vote.

President Johnson knew he needed to protect the voting rights of African Americans. He asked Congress to pass a Voting Rights Act. This law made tests and other unfair practices illegal. The law passed, and Johnson signed it on August 6, 1965.

► After Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act (below), thousands of African Americans registered to vote.



When Johnson signed the law, he said it was important for African Americans to sign up and vote. He told them, "Your future and your children's future depend on it."

Johnson knew that voting is an important way for citizens to take part in government. He believed it was the government's job to protect that right for all citizens. Johnson also wanted Americans to practice **tolerance**, even when they disagreed with other people.



Another part of the Great Society plan was the "War on Poverty." Johnson remembered the poverty he had seen as a child and as a teacher. He knew that many people did not have enough of the things they needed. He wanted to give them more opportunities.

Johnson urged Congress to pass laws to help people get better medical care. Another law created preschool programs so children could get a head start on learning to read.

The Head Start program was set up during Johnson's presidency to help young children learn to read. It is still in use today.





▲ In 1966, Johnson went to Vietnam to visit American soldiers.

Johnson hoped people would come together to win the War on Poverty. In the last years he was President, however, a different war took up most of his attention. The United States was fighting a war in Vietnam, a country in Southeast Asia.

Many people thought the war could not be won. They said the United States should stop fighting. Johnson tried to end the war.

In 1968, Johnson decided not to run for President again. He said running for President would take time away from his efforts to end the war in Vietnam.

Remembering Johnson

After his presidency ended, Johnson and his family left Washington, D.C. They went to live at his ranch in Texas. Johnson continued talking to people about problems facing the nation.

Today, you can learn more about Johnson at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum in Austin, Texas. You can visit the place where he was born and see the one-room schoolhouse he attended.

Visitors to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum can learn about Johnson's life from childhood to Presidency.





▲ Scientists in this room at the Johnson Space Center watch over the international space station.

Many important places are named for President Johnson. His old office in the United States Senate building is called the LBJ room. "LBJ" was Johnson's nickname. The name of the Johnson Space Center near Houston, Texas, honors Johnson's work on the United States space program. His efforts helped the country send the first two people ever to walk on the moon.

The laws and programs Johnson worked for continue to help people. People still use many of the roads and schools for which Johnson voted. Elderly people and poor people can get better medical care. Children can get a head start on learning.

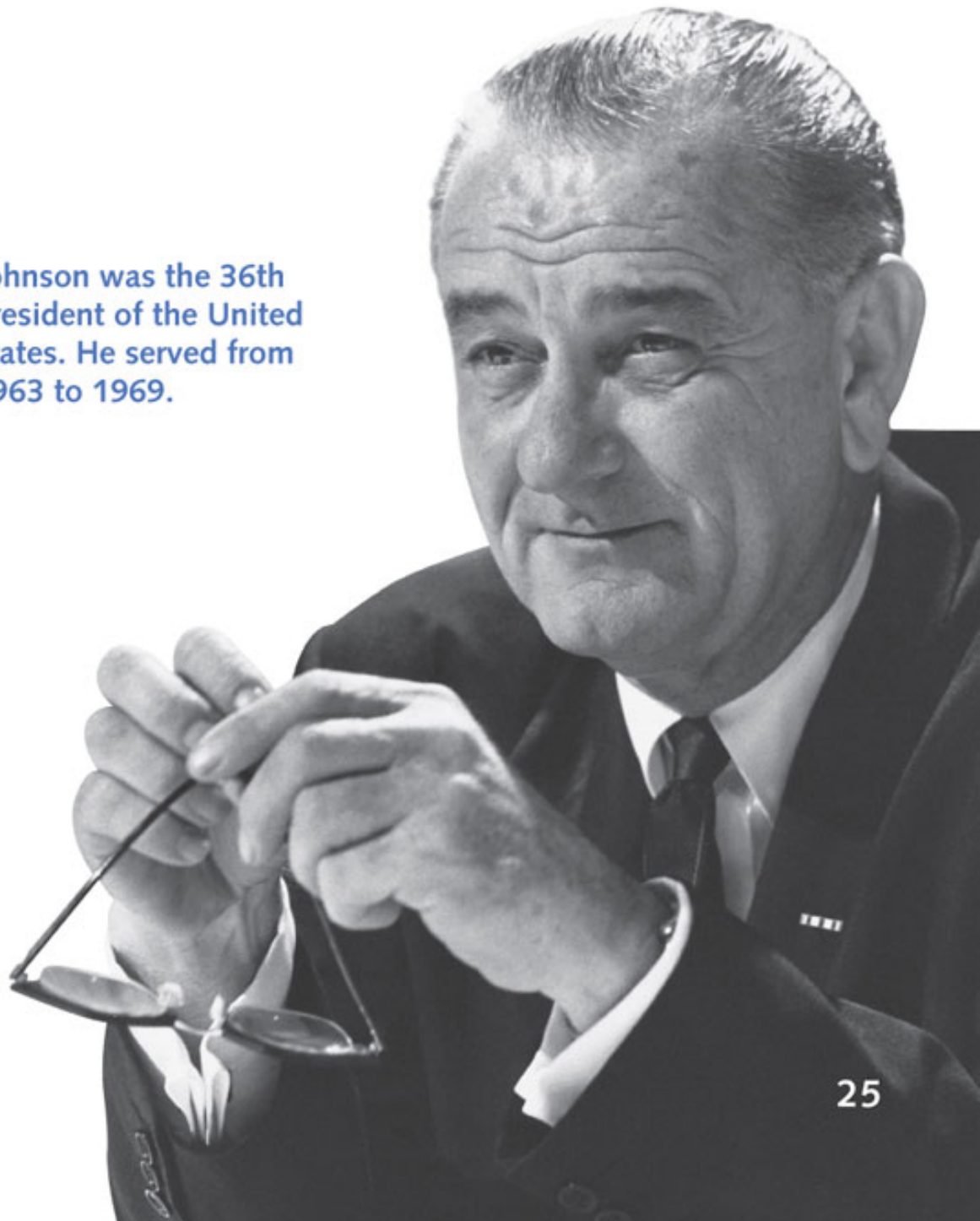
Another of Johnson's lasting changes was to the Supreme Court. He chose Thurgood Marshall to be a judge on the Court. As a lawyer, Marshall had fought for civil rights. He became the first African American judge on the Supreme Court.

When Johnson (right) chose Thurgood Marshall (left) for the Supreme Court, he said, "I believe it is the right thing to do . . ."



President Johnson believed in tolerance and opportunity for all people. He believed that citizens must continue to work to create more freedom and win equality. In 1972 he said, "Until every boy and girl born into this land . . . can stand on the same level ground, our job will not be done."

► Johnson was the 36th President of the United States. He served from 1963 to 1969.



Lyndon Baines Johnson

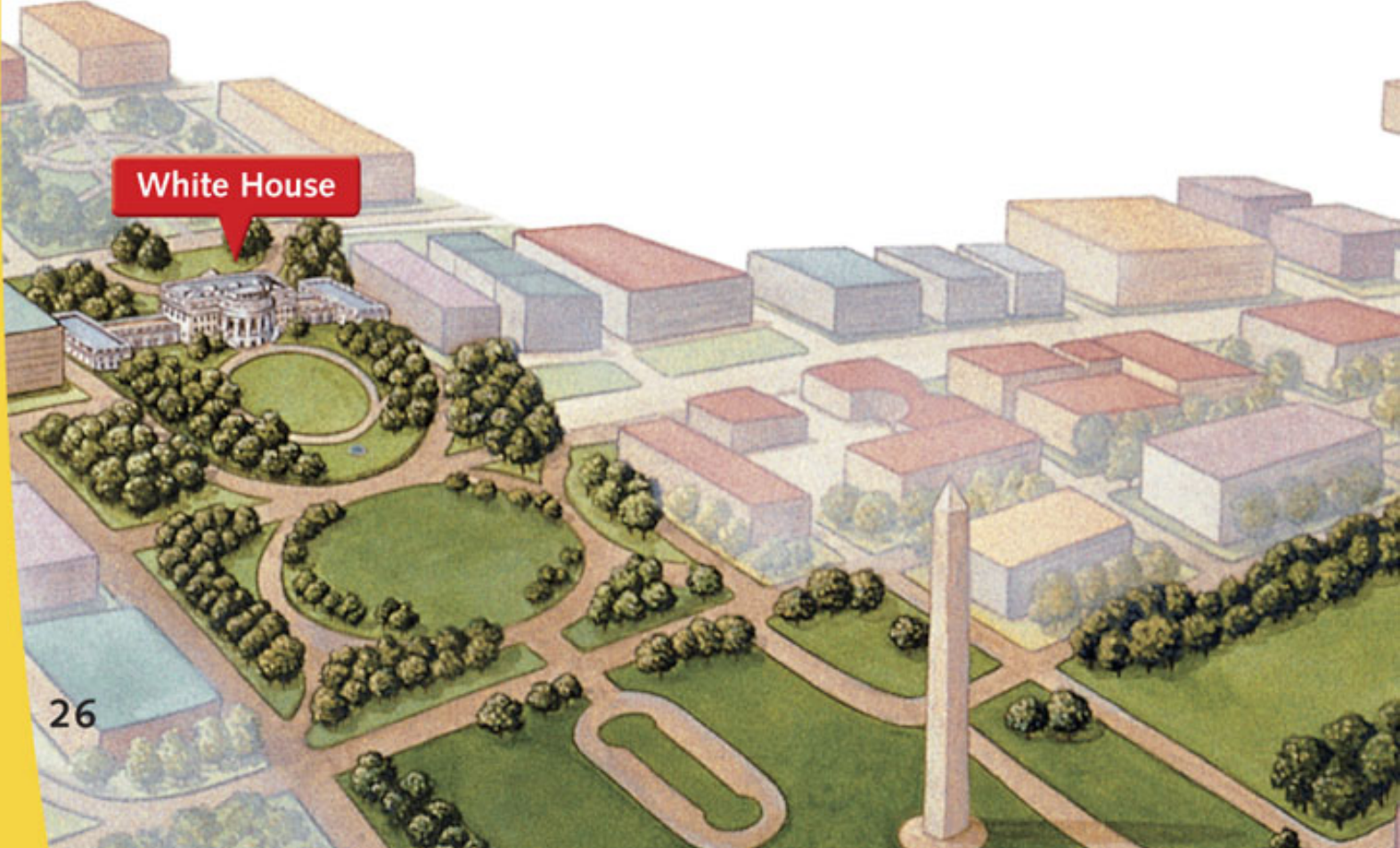
Lyndon Johnson spent much of his life in Washington, D.C.

1937–1948: House of Representatives

Representative Johnson helped bring roads, schools, and electricity to his Congressional district in Texas.

1948–1961: Senate

Senator Johnson, as a powerful leader of the Senate, helped pass civil rights laws.



White House

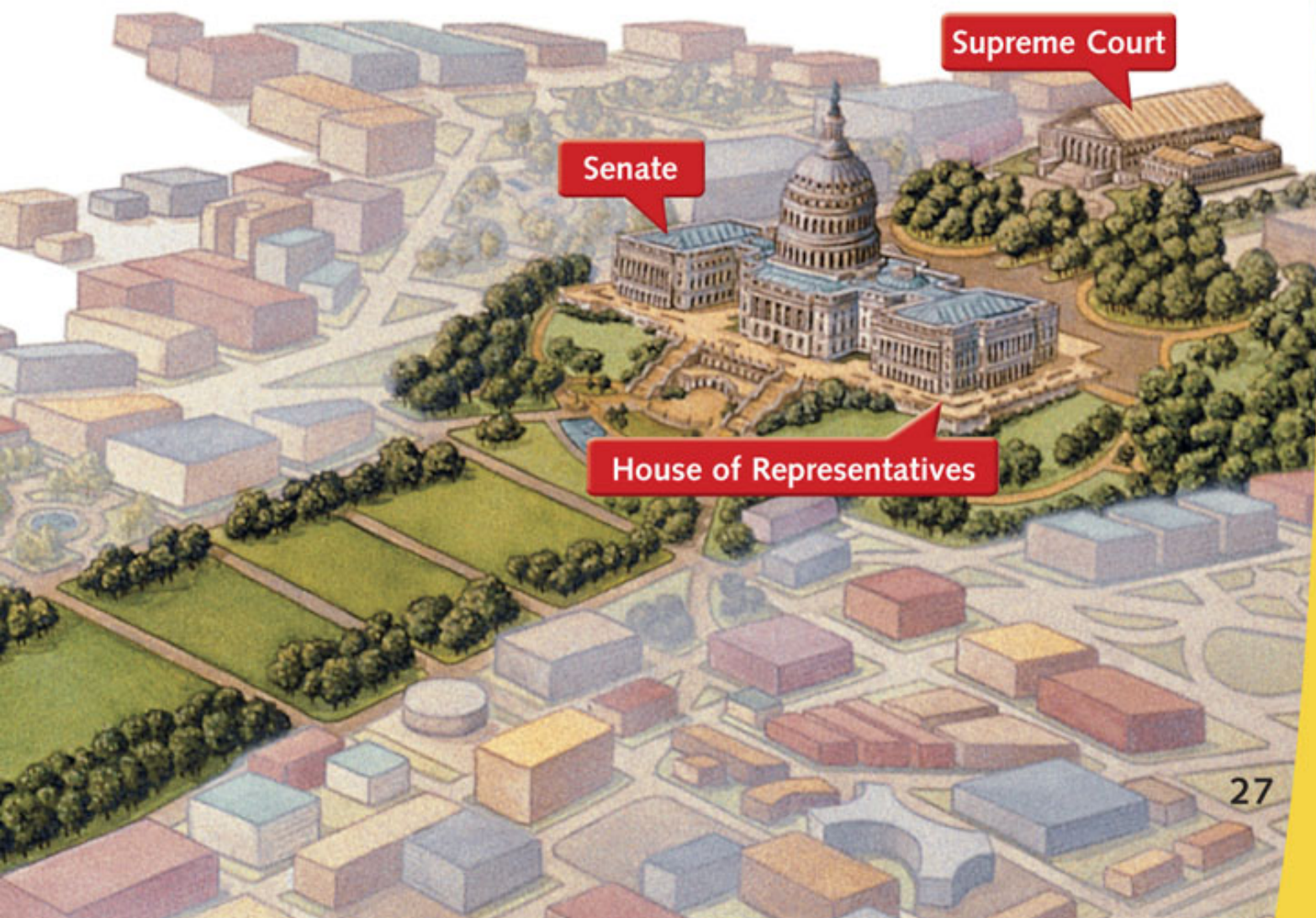
1963–1968: White House

President Johnson worked to get the Voting Rights Act and many laws of his Great Society plan passed.

1967: Supreme Court

President Johnson chose Thurgood Marshall as the first African American judge on the Supreme Court.

**What jobs did Johnson have in Washington, D.C.?
Write a sentence about each job.**



Understanding Character Traits

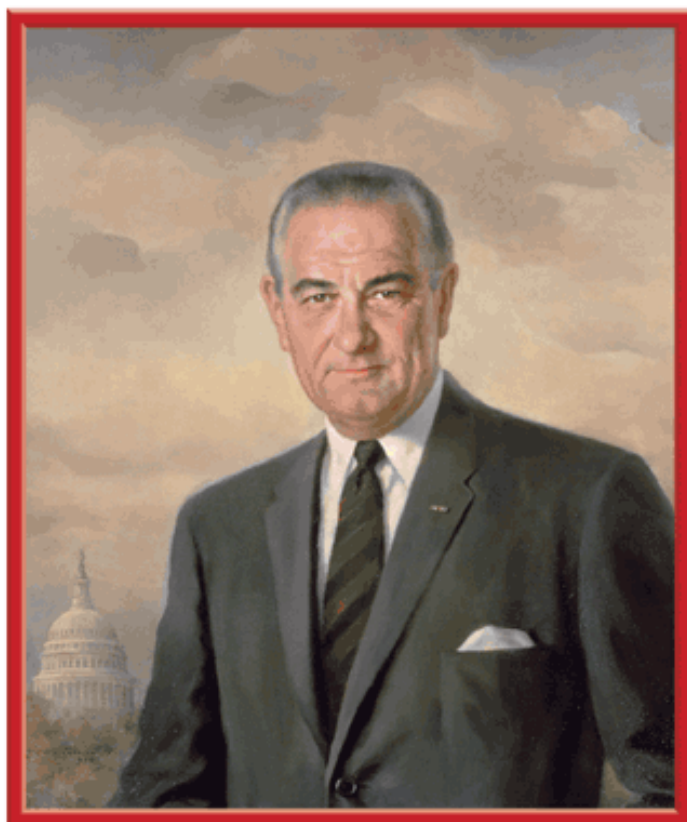
People who work hard at something and don't give up show **diligence**. Lyndon Johnson's steady work on civil rights showed diligence.

Tolerance means respect for the values and beliefs of others, including beliefs and values we do not share. Johnson wanted laws that supported tolerance of others.

People who believe that leaders have the right to lead have **respect for and acceptance of authority**. When Johnson was Vice President, he helped President Kennedy because he respected Kennedy's authority as a leader.

What are some ways you might build these character traits in yourself?

- Johnson's diligence helped many major laws to be passed.



GLOSSARY

authority the right and power to lead (p. 9)

campaign the period during which people running for office try to convince voters to vote for them (p. 4)

civil rights the basic rights that all citizens in a country have (p. 11)

diligence the act of hard work and attention given to a subject (p. 15)

district the part of a state represented by a member of the House of Representatives (p. 7)

poverty a lack of money (p. 3)

representative a member of a state or national legislature (p. 4)

segregation the practice of keeping people of different races apart (p. 10)

senator a member of the United States Senate (p. 4)

tolerance respect for others' values and beliefs (p. 19)

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Lyndon Baines Johnson knew what it was like to have little money or opportunity. When he became President, he declared a “war on poverty” and worked to protect the rights of African Americans.

“The answer for all our national problems . . . comes to a single word. That word is education.”

—Lyndon B. Johnson

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